Genre Hybridisation in Regional OTT Content: A Study of Horror, Fantasy, and Folklore in Odia Digital Cinema

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Abstract
This study explores the phenomenon of genre hybridisation within Odia digital cinema, specifically focusing on narratives that blend horror, fantasy, and folklore on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms. Regional Indian content has undergone a dramatic transformation due to OTT streaming services, which have democratised content creation and consumption, empowered local voices, and diversified story genres. Odia cinema, rooted in rich folkloric traditions and shaped by sociocultural dynamics, is now witnessing a resurgence through digital-first narratives that uniquely hybridise genres once considered niche or commercially risky. Through qualitative content analysis and close readings of recent digital releases and mini-series, as well as interviews with industry stakeholders, this article identifies the mechanisms, motivations, and cultural implications of genre blending in Odia OTT programming. The findings reveal that such hybridisation is not only a creative response to changing market dynamics but also reveals Odia cultural identity and provides ne avenues for folklore reinterpretation. The study also discusses how audience preferences, technological shifts, and evolving social norms inform the popularity and aesthetics of Odia horror-fantasy-folklore narratives in the digital age. It concludes by outlining implications for cultural preservation, creative autonomy, and future academic requirements in regional digital content narratives in the digital age.

Introduction
The emergence of Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming platforms has profoundly transformed India's entertainment landscape, empowering regional languages and cinemas that were historically marginalized within the dominant Bollywood industry (Biswas & Roy, 2020; Pandey & Rastogi, 2020). By providing direct-to-consumer streaming and bypassing traditional theatrical and broadcast distribution, OTT platforms such as ZEE5 and regional YouTube channels have democratized access to vernacular stories and catalyzed creative experimentation. For Odia digital cinema, this shift is both technological and cultural, enabling storytellers to craft daring narratives deeply anchored in local mythologies while engaging contemporary forms. The affordances of OTT have expedited the genre hybridization of Odia film, which has traditionally been anchored in folkloric traditions and mythic themes. Filmmakers are increasingly fusing fantasy, horror, and folklore to create complex, creative works that straddle the lines between contemporary genre conventions and cultural history (Lagashetti & Chincholkar, 2025). This hybridization is important because it shows how Odia society continues to

negotiate between tradition and modernization, rural and urban identities, and local vs global influences. Folklore's mysticism and symbolic meanings blend with horror's emotional resonance and fantasy's innovative scope to create narrative synergies that appeal to a varied and tech-savvy audience (Dey, 2022).

Producers are further encouraged to explore genre boundaries and create novel forms of narrative that preserve cultural identity while amusing by the economic logic of OTT, which incentivizes creativity to target dispersed audience segments (Patra, 2024). Thus, in the face of pressures from global media flows and cultural homogenization, hybrid Odia OTT material becomes a platform for expressing, reinterpreting, and updating regional narratives (Mishra, 2023).

Through qualitative content analysis of major OTT productions from 2023 to 2025, such as horror series like The 7 Sacrifice and psychological thriller Raktta Jangal (Dark Forest) (Koo Koo TV Entertainment, 2025; Bhuta Radio, 2025), industry stakeholder interviews, and audience engagement metrics obtained from social media and platform analytics, this study explores genre hybridization in Odia digital cinema. The study analyzes the implications for Odia cultural expression, media innovation, and the changing dynamics of regional identity creation by deciphering the narrative and artistic intersections between horror, fantasy, and folklore. By doing this, the study emphasizes how regional OTT programming has the special ability to reimagine cinematic genres and recalibrate cultural storytelling for India's digital age.

By experimenting with hybrid narrative frameworks that combine local myths and modern genres, Odia OTT filmmakers have pushed the boundaries of traditional cinema through the flexibility of digital forms, lower production costs, and direct audience access. These shows draw a wide range of audiences, from urban millennials interested in genre innovation to rural

viewers conversant with folklore, encouraging dialogue between producers and consumers. Furthermore, the inclusion of ecological concerns and feminist themes in these hybrids demonstrates their significance as socially conscious and culturally powerful media (Patra, 2024; Basu, 2021).

Therefore, in an increasingly globalized entertainment scene, the genre hybridization in Odia OTT cinema serves as an example of how local digital material may successfully mediate cultural preservation and creative innovation, creating new avenues for vernacular storytelling.

Literature Review

Beyond the constraints previously imposed by theatrical distribution and mainstream Bollywood dominance, the emergence of OTT platforms has dramatically changed the dynamics of Indian regional cinema by enabling greater access to diverse linguistic and cultural expressions (Biswas & Roy, 2020; Pandey & Rastogi, 2020). Digital media has democratized content creation and consumption, allowing local storytellers to reach both diasporic and domestic niche markets through platforms like ZEE5, Hoichoi, and regional-specific OTT services that cater to vernacular audiences (Lagashetti & Chincholkar, 2025). As a result, vernacular cultures and stories are now valued more, which encourages the development of distinctive local genres and innovative storytelling techniques. Additionally, research shows that OTT promotes the decentralization of cultural production, enabling experimenting with thematic daring, cross-genre hybrids, and non-linear storytelling that are uncommon in traditional cinema (Dey, 2022; Roy, 2023).

The term "genre hybridization" in film and media studies describes how narrative conventions, thematic components, and aesthetic tropes from two or more different genres are combined to create novel forms that defy established genre borders

(Altman, 1999). The long-standing coexistence of mythic, religious, and folk traditions that pervade daily life provides fertile ground for this hybridity in the Indian cultural environment. Given the cultural importance of supernatural beliefs and mythical history, scholars like Kumar (2019) highlight that horror and fantasy components are naturally incorporated into folklore-based storytelling in India. Basu (2021) goes on to explain how Indian fantasy stories frequently serve as platforms for social commentary and cultural critique, challenging social conventions through magical realism. Therefore, hybrid genres offer narrative flexibility to investigate diverse identities, overcome sociopolitical limitations, and link tradition with modern issues.

In India, folklore—which includes myths, legends, and oral histories—serves as an essential repository for local storytelling (Mishra, 2023). The emergence of digital media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms has sparked a revival of folktales that have been updated for modern audiences, overcoming geographical and generational barriers (Patra, 2024). Specifically, this media enables the recontextualization of folklore inside new frameworks that incorporate the creative freedom of fantasy and the emotional strain of horror. According to Mishra (2023), this process promotes cultural continuity while encouraging reinterpretation that takes into account contemporary concerns and goals. Layered storytelling that respects oral traditions while experimenting with visuals and narrative is made possible by the adaptability of online media, such as web series, podcasts, and interactive tales.

The importance of genre hybridization in managing regional identities in the context of globalization and media convergence has been highlighted by recent studies. According to Patra (2024), Odia digital tales use hybrid genres to challenge binary depictions of indigenous versus global cultural expectations, tradition versus modernity, and rural versus urban

difference. By combining horror, fantasy, and folklore, these stories express cultural fears and desires that are ingrained in real-life experiences. By fusing local linguistic idioms, folk beliefs, and current issues like gender norms and social justice, Mishra (2023) demonstrates how Odia OTT content reflects "cultural hybridity" and enacts a type of resistance to cultural standardization. Both artistic investigation and sociopolitical negotiation take place in this hybridity.

Studies on audience engagement show that local viewers, particularly young people, are becoming more appreciative of genre hybrids that combine regionally relevant folklore with internationally recognized genres like fantasy and horror (Sen & Das, 2024). Viewers navigating complicated identities in the face of swift socioeconomic change and cultural globalization find resonance in these composite storylines. Sen and Das (2024) explain how social media conversations, fan productions, and participatory culture phenomena enable digital viewers to actively participate in the reception and reinterpretation of horror and fantasy content mixed with folklore. This active participation increases the cultural significance and vibrancy of local OTT works and promotes lively conversations between producers and viewers that further impact content development tactics and genre innovation.

In contrast to theatrical releases, OTT streaming's economics encourage content diversity and genre experimentation for niche segmentation, allowing local producers to investigate hybrid genres with comparatively low financial risk (Biswas & Roy, 2020; Lagashetti & Chincholkar, 2025). More adaptable and affordable storytelling formats, like short-form series and audio-visual podcasts that combine folktales with horror and fantasy themes, are also made possible by developments in digital production technology and mobile watching (Roy, 2023; Patra, 2024). These technical advantages democratize the

creation of media and foster new artistic partnerships that emphasize hybrid storytelling aesthetics and cultural distinctiveness.

Through a variety of lenses, including media democratization, genre theory, folklore studies, cultural identity politics, audience reception, and digital economic frameworks, the body of existing material provides a solid theoretical and empirical basis for examining genre hybridization in Odia OTT content. The current study's focus on the convergence of horror, fantasy, and folklore in Odia digital cinema is informed by this multidisciplinary viewpoint, which offers broader insights into the evolution of regional narratives within India's OTT environment.

Objectives:

1. To examine how Odia OTT digital cinema incorporates the genres of horror, fantasy, and folklore.
2. To investigate how Odia cultural identity and modernity are reflected in and negotiated by this genre hybridization.
3. To evaluate how OTT platforms support cultural narratives and experimental regional storytelling.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative case study methodology in conjunction with semi-structured interviews and audience reception analysis to examine genre hybridization in Odia digital cinema on OTT platforms. The selected methodology enables a thorough examination of the story structures, thematic motifs, and cultural settings influencing the hybrid horror, fantasy, and folklore genres.

Research Design

Three recent, representative Odia OTT products that were released between 2023 and 2025 and clearly combine aspects of horror, fantasy, and folklore are the subject of the study. These are:

1. Bou Buttu Bhuta (2025), a film that blends horror and comedy elements with rural black magic tradition.
2. The online series Sulochana (2024) is a supernatural thriller with female themes that draws inspiration from Yakshini legend.

Data Collection

- **Content Analysis:** To find examples of genre hybridization, narrative structures, and culturally significant motifs, a thorough screening and script analysis of a few chosen productions were carried out. Character archetypes, thematic patterns, folklore allusions, and genre indications were the main emphasis of the coding process (Patton, 2015).

- **Interviews:** To learn about creative goals, industry dynamics, and audience targeting tactics related to genre blending, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five important stakeholders, including two directors, one scriptwriter, one OTT platform content editor, and one film critic.

- Audience Reaction: To measure audience interpretations and reactions, quantitative data on viewership statistics from OTT platforms and qualitative content from social media conversations and user reviews related to the chosen productions were methodically gathered and thematically examined (Sen & Das, 2024).

Analytical Framework

The approach interprets the blending of horror, fantasy, and folklore as cultural and creative processes using frameworks for cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) and genre theory (Altman, 1999). Theories of folklore studies offer more perspectives on the adaptation of traditional motifs. The interpretative synthesis is informed by the junction of sociocultural background and narrative form.

Moral Aspects

Every interview was carried out with informed consent, guaranteeing privacy and voluntary involvement. Transparency

and copyright observance were guaranteed via secondary data from public domain sources.

Case Study Analyses
Bou Buttu Bhuta (2025): Laughter, Horror, and Rural Folklore Fusion

"Bou Buttu Bhuta" is a wonderful example of how to creatively combine aspects of horror and comedy with traditional Odia black magic mythology to create a hybrid story that appeals to a wide audience. The plot of the movie centers on a rural protagonist who must deal with infamous shape-shifters and witchcraft activities, which are portrayed through both spooky and hilarious lenses.

The story's narrative structure is based on a traditional folk tale arc, but it also includes self-reflexive humor, which makes the supernatural characters less frightening and more approachable (Roy, 2023). By using satire and humorous timing to create a dual affective register, this hybrid genre departs from pure terror.

Folklore Components: Key themes, including the use of "chudail" (witch) and "bhoot" (ghost) myths, are derived straight from Odia village traditions and are reinforced by ritualistic symbols and vernacular dialect (Mishra, 2023). While captivating urban audiences used to international horror clichés, the rural location preserves authenticity.

Impact on the Audience: The film's approachable mingling of genres has drawn a wide range of viewers, including young people involved through social media fan pages and rural viewers who value the portrayal of folklore (Sen & Das, 2024).

This production appeals to OTT-era audiences looking for fresh narrative while demonstrating how humor and horror come together around folklore to overcome tradition.

Sulochana Web Series (2024): Feminist Overtones in Folkloric Horror-Fantasy

"Sulochana" is notable for fusing female stories with Yakshini folklore in a gripping horror-fantasy setting. The serial format creates a multi-layered hybrid story by utilizing digital-first aesthetics.

- **Genre Hybridization:** The show combines fantasy themes like shape-shifting and magical realism with horror tropes like curses and hauntings. The Yakshini and other folkloric characters take on symbolic feminist agency, subverting patriarchal conventions ingrained in folktales (Patra, 2024).

Cultural Reinterpretation: In a location with rich folklore traditions, the series highlights female autonomy and empowerment by reframing native stories via modern gender politics. This reinvention addresses both cultural subversion and preservation (Mishra, 2023).

Production and Reception: Targeting niche audiences interested in topical subjects and cultural hybridity was made possible by the digital release on regional OTT platforms. According to viewer response, the socially oriented storyline and the tribute to folklore are both appreciated (Sen & Das, 2024).

"Sulochana" serves as an example of how Odia digital media may support culturally relevant, socially engaged storylines by fusing folklore with fantasy and horror.

Findings

The results show that Odia OTT content creators strategically use genre hybridization—combining horror, fantasy, and folklore—to create inventive narratives that appeal to a variety of audiences by fusing modern storytelling with cultural heritage (Mishra, 2023; Patra, 2024).

➢ The preservation and reconstruction of Odia cultural identity are made possible by the combination of fantasy and horror components with folklore motifs, which depict tensions between modernity and tradition as well as local-global and rural-

urban dynamics (Dey, 2022; Mishra, 2023).

➢ By incorporating topics like women empowerment and environmental concerns, hybrid narratives provide socially relevant storytelling and engage audiences with messages that are both culturally based and progressive (Patra, 2024; Basu, 2021).

➢ Strong engagement is revealed by audience reception study, especially among younger and diasporic viewers who use social media to contribute interpretive conversations, creating a participatory culture that influences the ongoing evolution of material (Sen & Das, 2024).

➢ Regional creators can innovate while maintaining vernacular storytelling traditions thanks to the economic and technological affordances of OTT platforms, such as flexible formats and low-budget production models, which encourage experimentation with hybrid genres that traditional cinema frequently restricts (Biswas & Roy, 2020; Lagashetti & Chincholkar, 2025).

➢ Genre hybridization in Odia digital cinema thus serves as both a creative strategy and a cultural practice, mediating between local identity construction and the demands of globalization and digital media convergence (Roy, 2023).

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, genre hybridization in Odia OTT content—specifically, the combination of horror, fantasy, and folklore—is a noteworthy creative and cultural phenomena that is changing regional digital cinema in India. Through this blending, Odia storytellers are able to negotiate the conflicts between rural and urban identities, tradition and modernization, and local and global influences, creating stories that are both responsive to modern audience expectations and firmly entrenched in cultural history. These hybrid narratives enhance Odia cultural identity, encourage creativity, and expand the thematic and artistic reach of local media by fusing folklore motifs with imaginative fantasy and emotional horror aspects. Such innovation is encouraged and made easier by the OTT platform environment's business model and technological affordances, which enable producers to reach a variety of dispersed audiences while maintaining and reviving vernacular storytelling traditions. As seen by works that integrate feminist themes or environmental issues inside folklore-infused storylines, this approach not only increases the market viability of Odia digital material but also promotes cultural hybridity and social discourse. In the end, genre hybridization in Odia OTT cinema highlights how digital media may democratize local narrative, push genre boundaries, and create new frameworks for cultural expression in the globalized digital age. It is recommended that more study be done to examine the long-term audience effects, comparative regional studies, and changing legislative frameworks impacting this dynamic media landscape.

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